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How the Hashtag Revolutionizes the Way we Collectively Contend for our Interests

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How the Hashtag Revolutionizes the Way we Collectively Contend for our Interests

by

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How the Hashtag Revolutionizes the Way we Collectively Contend for our Interests

by

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Political contention has entered a new age. Over the past three years unprecedented large-scale movements have challenged states across the globe, and social media has been an important component in their development and articulation. With the advent of social media sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, ordinary people have the technological ability to instantaneously transcend space, time and resources (Aouraugh and Alexander 2011; Castells 2012; Earl and Kimport 2009, 2011; Eltantawy, Nahed and Wiest 2011; Gerbaudo 2012; Hands 2011; Holmes 2012; Mason 2012). Are we currently living in a historical moment where a new repertoire of contention is emerging? If so, how is social media changing the way we collectively contest for our interests? The theoretical framework I propose in this paper advances and elaborates a social geographic approach in the framing of political contention that emphasizes the importance of the spatiality and temporality created by the hashtag (#) in the development and articulation of today's social movements. In addition to secondary sources about the protests in Brazil (#VemPraRua), I draw on participant observations to analyze a new modular form of protest I call the "hashtag movement." I claim that the hashtag (#) creates a new space/time (Massey 1992, 2007; Soja 1996) that fundamentally shifts the process of nation-ness (Anderson 2006) and marks a new phase in the mediazation of modern culture (Thompson 1991); two fundamental shifts that I argue are comparable to the structural and cultural shifts that formed the modern repertoire of contention (Anderson 2006; Della Porta and Diani 1999; McAdam 1999; McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 2001; Sewell 1990, 1996; Swidler 1986; Tarrow 1993, 1994; Tilly 1986, 1995a, 1995b; Young 2002).

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Section 1: Introduction

Political contention has entered a new age. Over the past three years unprecedented large-scale movements have challenged states across the globe, and social media has been an important component in their development and articulation. With the advent of social media sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, ordinary people have the technological ability to instantaneously transcend space, time and resources (Aouraugh and Alexander 2011; Castells 2012; Earl and Kimport 2009, 2011; Eltantawy, Nahed and Wiest 2011; Gerbaudo 2012; Hands 2011; Holmes 2012; Mason 2012). Are we currently living in a historical moment where a new repertoire of contention is emerging? If so, how is social media changing the way we collectively contest for our interests?

The theoretical framework I propose in this paper advances and elaborates a social geographic approach in the framing of political contention that emphasizes the importance of the spatiality and temporality created by the hashtag (#) in the development and articulation of today's social movements. In addition to secondary sources about the protests in Brazil (#VemPraRua), I draw on participant observations to analyze a new modular form of protest I call the "hashtag movement." I claim that the hashtag (#) creates a new space/time (Massey 1992, 2007; Soja 1996) that fundamentally shifts the process of nation-ness (Anderson 2006) and marks a new phase in the mediazation of modern culture (Thompson 1991); two fundamental shifts that I argue are comparable to the structural and cultural shifts that formed the modern repertoire of contention (Anderson 2006; Della Porta and Diani 1999; McAdam 1999; McAdam,

Tarrow and Tilly 2001; Sewell 1990, 1996; Swidler 1986; Tarrow 1993, 1994; Tilly 1986, 1995a, 1995b; Young 2002).

Previous Literature

While research on the relationship between digital communication technology, society and political action is extensive (Castells 1983, 2009, 2010a, 2010b, 2011, 2012; Castells, Yazawa and Kiselyova 1995; Earl and Kimport 2009, 2011; Earl and Schussman 2008; Kahn and Kellner 2004; Lim 2006), research on Twitter is relatively sparse but rapidly growing. Scholars have described the geographical properties of the site's network (Java et al. 2007; Krishnamurthy, Gill and Arlitt 2008), have quantitatively and qualitatively analyzed communication patterns (Bruns and Stieglitz 2012; Haewon et al. 2009; Highfield, Harrington and Bruns 2013; Hughes and Palen 2009), have utilized a linguist approach to the study of the # (Cunha et al. 2011) and have discussed the political space created by Twitter and the # (Ausserhofer and Maireder 2013; Bruns and Burgess 2011; Small 2011). And while scholars, since the Arab Spring, have explored the role social media plays in the articulation and development of today's social movements (Aouraugh and Alexander 2011; Castells 2012; Eltantway and Weist 2011; Gerbaudo 2012; Gitlin 2012; Hands 2011; Holmes 2012; Kjerstin et al. 2013; Lim 2012; Mason 2012), nothing has been written about how the # is fundamentally shifting political contention.

Although I am largely in agreement with previous research this paper moves beyond current discussions in two important ways. First, the discussion on the impact of

digital and social media on social movements and activism has been largely framed by a resource mobilization approach (Castells 2012; Earl and Kimport 2009, 2011; Earl and Schussman 2008; Eltantway and Weist 2011; Gerbaudo 2012; Hands 2011; Holmes 2012; Mason 2012). Therefore, this paper moves beyond discussing the affordances of social media as a network by operationalizing concepts from social geography to reframe the # as a new cultural schema I am calling "social mass media."

By reframing the # in this way, I am able sidestep the techno-futurist utopic/dystopic discussion (Morozov 2012; Shirky 2009; Rushkoff 2013; Lanier 2013; McChesney 2013), while furthering the conversation regarding the role of spatiality in political theory (Castells 1983; Harvey 1989; Leitner, Sheppard and Sziarto 2007; Lim 2006; Martin and Miller 2003; Massey 1992, 2006; Sewell 2001; Soja 1989, 1996; Tilly 2000) and the role of culture in the formation of political contention (Sewell 1990, 1996; Swidler 1986; Young 2002). Therefore, the second important way this paper moves beyond prior research is by expanding the discussion of spatiality and culture regarding political contention, while also bringing in temporality as a concept. Ultimately, the claim of this paper has broad implications for social theories of political contention, culture, nation building, spatiality and temporality.

Structure of Paper

This paper is organized into six sections. The first section is a general discussion on the mechanics of Twitter and the #, where I also define *social mass media*. The next section outlines Anderson's (2006) argument by discussing three things: his definition of nation-ness, the concept of the imagined community, and homogenous-empty time vs.

contemporaneous time. Moreover I extend Anderson's argument by discussing how *social mass media* changes the process of nation-ness. The third section is an outline of Thompson's (1991) argument where I discuss three things: his definition of ideology, the mediazation of culture, and time-space distanciation. I extend Thompson's argument by demonstrating how *social mass media* ushers in a new phase in the mediazation of modern culture. The next section outlines the structural and cultural mechanisms behind the formation of the modern repertoire of contention. In the fifth section I draw on participant observations of #VemPraRua to discuss the form, purpose, and institutional source of a new form of protest I call the "hashtag movement." I conclude with a brief discussion of what to expect in the coming years from Brazil, and what kind of evidence we should find if such a repertoire shift is occurring.

Section 2: Social Mass Media

Twitter and the

In this section I discuss the general mechanics of Twitter, hashtags and define the term *social mass media*. Twitter is a social networking platform that provides a qualitatively different service from other social networking platforms such as Facebook, LinkedIn and Tumblr. Twitter is a microblogging service where users post tweets, which are digital messages less than 140 characters in length, that answer a very simple question, "What are you doing right now?"

When Twitter first launched in 2006 the site "had almost none of the extended functionality that it does today," with most of its current functionality being the result of user-led innovation (Bruns and Burgess 2011: 2). This means when Twitter first launched it consisted of text-only tweets and over the years the architecture of Twitter's platform has expanded to meet the organic needs of users. Twitter's architecture now allows its users to: post tweets that consist of video, photos and hyperlinks; mention other users within tweets using the symbol "@" followed by the account name; and mark keywords within tweets with a pound symbol (#).

According to the Twitter help center website, "The pound symbol (#), called a hashtag, is used to mark keywords or topics in a Tweet. It was created organically by Twitter users as a way to categorize messages." What this means is users consciously add their experience, thoughts, and feelings – i.e. their tweet – to an ongoing stream – a visual representation of all tweets categorized under a specific topic, word or phrase – by placing a pound symbol (#) in front of any word. This allows other users to view those tweets by searching for that specific topic, word or phrase.

Image 1

Take Image 1, a screenshot of the stream for #VemPraRua at 9:32PM CST on August 13, 2013. It is important to note the exact time and date because the stream is a feed of messages that updates every time a user posts a new tweet with the designated keyword. The stream chronologically organizes tweets with the most recent one at the top. Each tweet has a time stamp that measures the difference between when the tweet was posted and when you viewed it; and for standardization Twitter utilizes the Greenwich Mean Time Zone. This means when a tweet is "immediately" posted, relative to "when" you are viewing it, the stream places that tweet at the top with a time stamp

that says "now" then "1 second," "2 seconds" and so on up to hours, days and years. Therefore, the stream for #VemPraRua "right now" is something completely different from when I took the screenshot because it is something that is ever expanding. Next, I will define what I call *social mass media*.

Digital Messaging vs. Social Media vs. Social Mass Media

Whether it was BBM (Black Berry Messenger) utilized by protestors in London, or Facebook in the Arab Spring, or Twitter in Occupy and Brazil, digital communication has played a vital role in the organization and execution of recent episodes of contentious politics. But to speak of digital communication as if BBM, Facebook, Twitter and the # were essentially the same would be an oversimplification that muddles our understanding of 21st century political contention (Aouraugh and Alexander 2011; Castells 2012; Eltantway and Weist 2011; Gerbaudo 2012; Gitlin 2012; Hands 2011; Holmes 2012; Kjerstin et al. 2013; Lim 2012; Mason 2012).

Figure 1.

Digital Messaging	Social Media	Social Mass Media
Text messaging, E-mail, BBM	Facebook, Twitter, Instagram	#, Geotagging, memes

Figure 1 separates a handful of digital communication tools that are readily available to us, into three categories. *Digital messaging* is any platform or application with the primary function of messaging of video or photos between two "entities" (either between individuals, organizations, or organizations and individuals). Therefore, the digital communication tools within this category are only effective when you have the

recipient's specific *digital address* – i.e. cell phone number, email address or BBM account name. While the other two categories have a secondary function of direct digital messaging.

Social media is a category of sites, such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, that allow an individual, organization or collective to publicly or privately display a digital representation, while also allowing for some degree of social interaction between other digital representations. Two things distinguish this category from the other two.

Image 2

First, this category of social tools has the capacity of being "social." People can "like," "comment" and "share" whatever is publicly posted creating a social exchange between the users. The second thing that distinguishes this category is the fact that you control, to some extent, how public your profile is. Companies for example maintain public Facebook profiles where anyone who has a Facebook account can view it. On the other hand, individuals can create private accounts that allow only "friends" - those approved by the user - to view the user's profile. Therefore, this category of sites and

applications allow for an element of control as to who gets to view your profile and posts, while also allowing the capabilities of communicating with other digital representations you may not know offline.

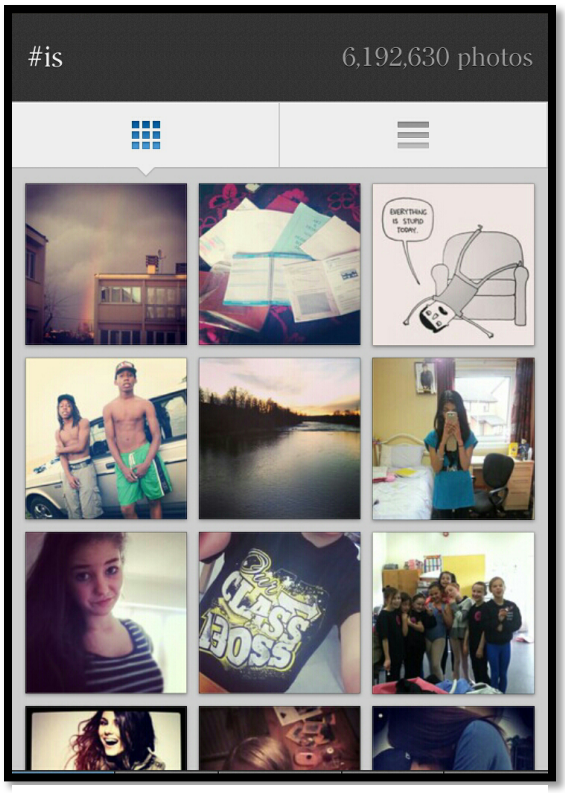

Image 3

The final category is *social mass media*. This category encompasses, not sites, but social tools that users utilize through social media platforms to convey a message to the Internet. As discussed earlier, the # categorizes posts and allow any user to view that post regardless of the users relationship to the user viewing it. Therefore, these *digital tools* allow users to directly reach a mass audience. In Image 2 user @wendydaynes96 posts a photo and caption on Instagram – hereafter referred to as "a post" – where each word is marked with a #.

Image 3 is a screenshot of the stream for "#is" at 12:25 PM CST on March 19, 2013. As can be seen #is contains over six million photos with no discernible pattern as to why these images are contained within the same stream. This is because anyone can use a # and any word can have a # - giving total freedom to users on how and when to use them.

Overall, the # is utilized similarly between Twitter and Instagram with one distinct difference - Instagram has no character limit to posts. This creates a strategy of hashtag "spraying" where users embed a number of "mundane" hashtags to maximize their reach. Twitter on the other hand has a 140 character limit making the use of the # more strategic.

There are two takeaways from this section. First, the # instantaneously amalgamates disparate experiences, regardless of spatial or temporal distance, by categorizing tweets into streams. Second, a # allows a user to instantly interact with a mass audience, with minimal interaction with media institutions, creating a new cultural form I call *social mass media*. Therefore, to understand how the # impacts political contention today we must understand how it changes the process of nation-ness (Anderson 2006).

Section 3: The New Mass Ceremony

What I will demonstrate in this section is how social mass media is changing the process of nation-ness, suggesting the emergence of a new modern nation. Three things will be discussed in this section: the concept of nation-ness, the concept of the imagined community, and the shift from homogenous-empty time to contemporaneous time. I conclude the section describing a new mass ceremony that reifies a new *imagined community* through participation in hashtags.

Both Anderson's concept of nation-ness and the imagined community are closely tied together. Anderson defines the nation as an imagined community both "inherently limited and sovereign" (Anderson 2006: 6). It is *limited* because no nation imagines itself as "coterminous with mankind," meaning one nation does not encompass the entire human population. Instead a nation's boundaries end where another nation's begins. It is *sovereign* because a nation "dreams of being free," and it is this freedom that is used to measure the legitimacy of a nation. It is *imagined* because even in the smallest nation a member will never know, see or hear all of her fellow members. Therefore, the nation is imagined in the minds of each member. Finally, a nation is a *community* because "regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship" (Anderson 2006: 7). Anderson's concept of the nation, or nation-ness, essentially is his concept of the imagined community, but to better understand the concept of the imagined community it is important to go a bit further into his argument.

The nation, or imagined community, arose out of a particular set of historical forces: the rise of print-capitalism, the rationalization of time, the secularization of culture and the vernacularization of language. It is these four historical forces that brought about the imagined community, and ultimately the modern nation. In Western Europe, by the 18th century, the rise of nationalism can be seen because as the culture began to secularize two things drastically changed: the religious community and the dynastic realm.

As culture began to secularize so too did communal ties. Sacred languages, such as Latin, which were read, written and spoken by an elite literati group, held the ancient religious community together – creating a tiny religious community bound to the local literati elite. Then, as Europeans began to explore and "discover" other civilizations, the imaginations of Europeans expanded. Resulting in the downfall of Latin's significance. Anderson writes, "The fall of Latin exemplified a larger process in which the sacred communities integrated by old sacred languages were gradually fragmented, pluralized, and territorialized" (Anderson 2006: 19). Therefore, the vernacularization of language created a new world where communities had to be imagined.

Finally, with the fall of religious communities came the fall of the dynastic realm and with that fall came the need to create a new way of understanding the world. No longer were power and the world understood as being held in the body of the king or the divine. Power had to be held through secular means. With the decline of both the dynastic realm and the religious community came the secularization of time. Anderson writes on page 24:

> What has come to take the place of the mediaeval conception of simultaneity-along-time is, to borrow again from Benjamin, an idea of 'homogenous, empty time,' in which simultaneity is, as it were, transverse, cross-time, marked not by prefiguring and fulfillment, but by temporal coincidence, and measured by clock and calendar (Anderson 2006)

It is the secularization of time that lies at the foundation of understanding why print-capitalism was so important in the formation of the modern nation. Anderson demonstrates that print-capitalism utilizes calendrical time to mark events that were occurring throughout the nation. Since members of a given nation could never know all other members it was print-capitalism that fed the "imagination" of Europeans. Meaning, the novel and the newspaper "provided the technical means for 're-presenting' the kind of imagined community that is the nation" (Anderson 2006: 25). It did this in two ways.

First was the use of calendar dates to mark events, or as Anderson calls it "calendrical coincidence" (Anderson 2006: 33). It is the date at the top of the newspaper that helped members of the nation to imagine her fellow members. When someone sits down to read the paper and reads about an event occurring in a distant location it is the "characters" in the article that become imagined by the reader. The reader sees that a number of events occur within the nation never seen or heard by the reader directly, but because the newspaper is dated it allows for the reader to place these events within a "steady onward clocking of homogenous, empty time" (Anderson 2006: 33).

The second way the novel and the newspaper provided the technical means for "re-presenting" the nation is the "imagined linkage…in the relationship between the newspaper as a form of book, and the market" (Anderson 2006: 33). Since print-capitalism was motivated by profit it needed to create an ever-larger market. This resulted in two things: a growing literate population connected by languages such as French and

English, and a "mass ceremony" connecting each member of a nation. Anderson points out that every morning or evening a mass readership reads the same newspaper at roughly the same time, which creates an imagined community of fellow readers/members within the head of each reader. It was the ability of print-capitalism to create both "calendrical coincidence" and a "mass ceremony" that created the possibility "of a new form of imagined community, which in its basic morphology set the stage for the modern nation" (Anderson 2006: 46).

To summarize, there are three important takeaways from Anderson: homogenous-empty time (calendar time), calendrical coincidence and the role of the mass ceremony in reifying the *imagined community*. Next, I will extend Anderson's argument to demonstrate how social mass media is changing homogenous-empty time and calendrical coincidence, creating a new mass ceremony by reframing the # utilizing a social geographic approach.

Reframing the #

When we look at a city—its streets, its sidewalks and its public spaces—we must understand that how it is laid out and divided has as much political and social implications as the social phenomenon that occur within those spaces. Many scholars have written about the sociopolitical construction of space and place (Archigram 2000; Dear and Flusty 1999; Featherstone 1995; Graham and Marvin 2000; Jacobs 2000; Massey 1991; Radner 1999; Simmel 1971; Soja, Morales and Wolff 1983; Timothy 1999; Tuan 1977; Wilkins 2008; Zukin 1987, 1998 2000), but I have chosen to operationalize only two concepts: Edward Soja's (1996) concept of *thirdspace* and

Doreen Massey's (2006) concept of *contemporaneity* for this paper. These two concepts help to understand how the spatiality and temporality created by the # changes the process of nation-ness (Anderson 2006).

Soja understands subjects to be inherently "spatial beings," meaning we are active participants in the social construction of our spatialities through, what he calls, perceiving, conceiving and living in space. In other words, we as individual subjects do not understand the city as simply an amalgamation of constructed buildings because through interrelations with our environment and with other subjects we begin to ascribe meaning. For example, a part of the city becomes a "familiar neighborhood," or a specific building becomes "a home." Therefore, space is both materially (perceived) and mentally (conceived).

What Soja's concept of thirdspace does is open up this understanding of space to a third dimension he calls lived that is both part of and distinct from the material (perceived) and mental (conceived) dimensions of space. The material, mental and lived aspects of space all work together to construct our immediate, everyday environments. In sum, space has three interdependent dimensions: material, mental and lived.

The most basic way to understand Massey's concept of contemporaneity is to understand that space must be conceptualized as open and dynamic, never close and static. Massey has three basic propositions:

1. That we recognize space as a product of social/political/cultural interrelations.
2. That we understand space as the sphere in which distinct trajectories coexist; without space, no multiplicity; without multiplicity, no space.
    a. Space is predicated upon the existence of plurality - of distinct and various trajectories.

3. That we recognize space as constantly under construction; it is always in the process of being made because we must imagine space as a simultaneity of 'stories-so-far' or another way to say it, as interrelations so far.

Both space and time are integrally related in a way that if one is closed the other is inherently closed as well. In other words, how we conceptualize time (history) ultimately affects the way we conceptualize space (geography) and vice versa. By conceptualizing space and time as open and dynamic we allow for a more egalitarian understanding/construction of space, which ultimately allows for a more egalitarian understanding of global politics.

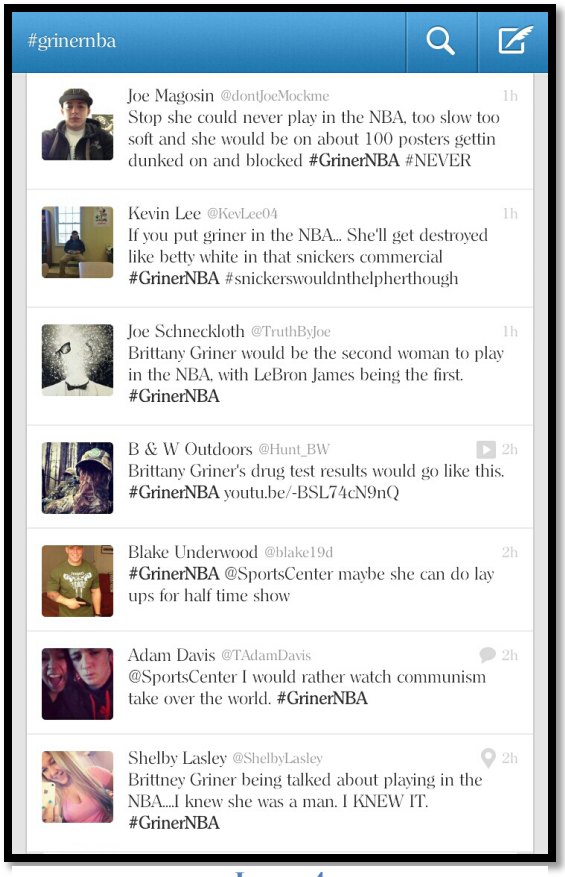

Image 4

Therefore, the # is *thirdspace* coupled with *contemporaneity* because it is not enough to just understand the # as both part of and distinct from the user's offline material and mental realities, we must also understand the # as an open and dynamic space that is constantly under construction.

For further clarification, Image 4 is a screenshot of #grinerNBA at 10:27AM CST on April 03, 2013. #grinerNBA was created by ESPN to discuss the "controversial" tweet Dallas Mavericks owner Mark Cuban posted on April 02, 2013. In the tweet Mark Cuban

hinted at the idea of drafting Brittney Griner to the Dallas Mavericks – which would have made her the first female player to play in the NBA.

Within #grinerNBA are a multitude of individuals, experiences and thoughts that become reframed under this single #. Therefore, the digital non-space of the stream represents a multitude of experiences and trajectories; in other words a multitude of presents that are reframed under a single #.

What makes this space unique is the contemporaneity of all the tweets. And just as the the calendrical coincidence was created by the date on the newspaper, the time stamps on the tweets are creating a new kind of calendrical coincidence based on the geographical-temporal location of the individual reading the # relative to the person who posted the tweet. As can be seen in the image above, different individuals who are most likely living in different parts of the country or world posted a number of tweets at the exact same time. This new calendrical coincidence created by the # changes homogenous-empty time into contemporaneous time, which is a shift comparable to the one Anderson observed in 18th Western Europe. Therefore, this shift towards contemporaneous time marks the emergence of a new *imagined community*.

The final thing to discuss is the new ceremony created by the advent of hashtags. New hashtags are either created or expanded every second of the day, undermining the idea of a mass ceremony of readers. At any given time you have no idea who else is reading the # you are reading, unless you are actively participating in its construction. Therefore, the mass ceremony is one of participation and not one of readership because it is through participation in trending topics, such as #VemPraRua or #grinerNBA, that the

imagined community is reified. Therefore, hashtags create a new mass ceremony that encompasses a multitude of distinct populations all over the world through participation.

In sum, the advent of hashtags shift time from homogenous-empty time to contemporaneous time, altering the idea of calendrical coincidence, which in turn creates a new mass ceremony. This results in a new *imagined community* based on active participation. The next section will be a discussion of how social mass media demarcates a new phase in the mediazation of modern culture.

Section 4: The New Phase in the Mediazation of Modern Culture

#MuslimRage

The image above is a screenshot of the Newsweek's cover released on September 17, 2012. Newsweek coupled the release of this cover with two tweets, which are shown below:

With these tweets, Newsweek sent an open invitation to the Internet to discuss the latest cover using the # - "#MuslimRage." What followed was something the editors of Newsweek did not consider – the # was "hijacked" by the Internet, flipped on its head, and transformed into a meme.

An Internet meme is difficult to define, but they are basically "cultural meanings" that spread rapidly throughout the Internet. A couple examples are the "Dos XX Man," "Grumpy Cat" and "The Double Rainbow" – I suggest doing a quick search to get a better understanding of what I am talking about. Internet memes can range in topics, and typically consist of an image, GIF or a #. For example, the "Grumpy Cat" meme is an image of a cat that literally looks grumpy. Individuals copy the image and superimpose text onto it, creating a new cultural meaning. This is essentially what happened to the Newsweek cover.

In an article, in *The Atlantic*, Megan Garber writes:

> It's worth marveling at how prismatic they are in their tone and intent. The hashtag now includes tweets from people who seem to be Muslim. It includes tweets from people who don't seem to be Muslim. It includes tweets from people who seem to be making fun of Muslims. It includes tweets from people who make fun of the people making fun of Muslims. The hashtag, as hashtags are wont to do, has taken on an organic life of its own, independent of its originator.

Within an hour, #MuslimRage was hijacked by the Internet and turned into a meme mocking the sensationalist cover published by Newsweek. Furthermore, as discussed by Garber in the passage above, the # contained within it a multitude of individuals, an important characteristic of these new cultural forms. Therefore, the story of #MuslimRage is an illustration of an important phenomenon that has been going on for some time now - the Internet meme.

The Mediazation of Culture

In this sub-section I outline Thompson's argument by discussing three things: his concept of ideology, the mediazation of culture, and time-space distanciation. Furthermore, I extend Thompson's argument by discussing how Internet memes, coupled with the advent of social mass media, usher in a new phase in the mediazation of modern culture.

Thompson's book, *Ideology and Modern Culture*, echoes the fact that social theory has largely ignored the role of media institutions in the production and dissemination of ideology. Thompson charges theorists of ideology of focusing too much on the processes of rationalization and secularization, ignoring the very institutions that create the symbolic goods that create ideology. Therefore, Thompson argues that the study of ideology must focus on the institutions of culture because in today's society they hold a monopolistic power over the production of symbolic forms.

Thompson writes, "Today we live in a world in which the extended circulation of symbolic forms plays a fundamental and ever-increasing role" (Thompson 1990: 1). The circulation of symbolic forms is pivotal in the creation of ideology in modern culture.

There are two fundamental assumptions Thompson makes about ideology that I too will adopt for this paper. First, the dominant symbolic forms circulating in a given society is never passively absorbed, but is received, consumed, analyzed and then "situated" within an individual's social context. Therefore, ideology is formed within the cultural transmission between those who receive symbolic forms and those who produce them.

This brings us to Thompson's second assumption of ideology: ideology maintains asymmetrical power relations between the elite and the masses. Ideology is not simply a "belief system," but a tool explicitly used to maintain asymmetrical power relations within a given society. In sum, the study of ideology in modern culture requires studying the "cultural transmission" of dominant symbolic forms. Meaning the study of ideology is the study of the mediazation of modern culture – the ever-increasing role media institutions and technology play in modern society.

The final thing to outline of Thompson's argument is his discussion on the three aspects of cultural transmission, which are: the technical medium of transmission, the institutional apparatus of transmission and the space-time distanciation involved in transmission. The technical medium of transmission "is the material substratum of a symbolic form, that is, the material components with which, and by virtue of which, a symbolic form is produced and transmitted" (Thompson 1990: 165). Moreover, a technical medium of transmission has three attributes: a degree of fixation, a degree of reproduction and a degree of participation.

For example, a conversation between two people does not inherently require any technical medium of transmission and therefore has a very low to non-existent degree of

fixation and reproduction. Moreover, a conversation requires skills, such as listening actively, "in order to encode and decode messages" (Thompson 1990: 166). On the other hand, watching a TV show requires a technical medium of transmission (i.e. video cameras, TV sets, TV stations, a TV, etc.) and therefore has a high degree of fixation and reproduction, which requires a different set of "skills" to encode and decode the messages.

The second aspect of cultural transmission is the institutional apparatus of transmission. By this, Thompson means, "a determinate set of institutional arrangements within which the technical medium is deployed and the individuals involved in encoding and decoding symbolic forms are embedded" (Thompson 1990: 167). Basically, this second aspect of cultural transmission refers to the bureaucratic structures in place that maintain the rules, resources and relations associated with the cultural transmission of symbolic forms. Meaning the institutional apparatus of transmission determines the degree of control an individual has over the process of cultural transmission.

Take for example the institutional arrangements involved with the transmission of a "literary text" (Thompson 1990: 167). The institutions involved in the transmission are the publisher, the distribution network, media institutions and the educational system, to name a few. Therefore, the decision to publish a book (a specific form of transmitting a literary text) is ultimately made by the publishing organization because it is able to "employ accumulated resources in order to produce and promote the book" (Thompson 1990: 167). Thompson describes this as the "channels of selective diffusion of symbolic forms" (Thompson 1990: 168). It is the organizations or individuals at the top of the

hierarchy that have the ability to circulate symbolic forms in "differing ways and to differing extents, in the social world" (Thompson 1990: 168).

The third, and final aspect of cultural transmission is the space-time distanciation. Thompson writes:

> The transmission of a symbolic form necessarily involves the detachment of this form, to varying degrees, from the context of its production: it is distanced from this context, both spatially and temporally, and inserted into new contexts which may be located at different times and places. We can use the term 'distanciation' to refer to this process of distancing. The nature and extent of distanciation varies from one technical medium to another

For example, a face-to-face conversation between two individuals requires a context of "co-presence," meaning both individuals must be spatially and temporally present for the conversation to occur. While on the other hand a conversation through texting allows for a high degree of space-time distanciation because neither individual has to be present spatially or temporally. Therefore, dependent on the technical medium, space-time distanciation can be great or non-existent, "allowing for an extension of availability of symbolic forms in time and space" (Thompson 1990: 169).

In sum, Thompson argues the study of ideology in modern culture requires understanding the role media institutions play in the cultural transmission of symbolic forms because within this process both ideology and asymmetrical power relations are created and maintained. As we have briefly discussed, the cultural transmission of symbolic forms has three aspects: the technical medium of transmission, the institutional apparatus of transmission and the space-time distanciation involved in transmission. These three aspects ground the study of ideology to the material realities of media institutions and markets. By observing the means of transmission of symbolic forms - the

mediazation of modern culture - we can understand how both ideology and asymmetrical power relations are created and maintained within a given society. I conclude this section with a brief discussion of how the symbolic forms of Internet memes and hashtags are ushering in a new phase in the mediazation of modern culture.

We are both Receiver and Producer of Symbolic Forms

Internet memes and hashtags represent a new form of cultural transmission because they utilize a new technical medium for transmission; a new institutional apparatus of transmission; and the space-time distanciation involved in the transmission is both greater and non-existent at the same time. With the rapid market expansion of affordable personal computers, came the technological innovation of the Internet. The Internet is therefore a new technical medium for the transmission of symbolic forms such as memes and hashtags.

The institutional apparatus of transmission surrounding the Internet meme and # is new. For example, software and hardware companies, such as Apple and Microsoft, allow for personal computers to exist. With that are institutions such as the electric company and Internet service providers that provide the resources necessary for an individual to access the Internet. Moreover, the Internet today is not only available at home.

With the creation of mobile networks we can access the Internet through our mobile phones as well, adding institutions such as the producers of smart phones and mobile service providers. Therefore, Internet memes are a symbolic form surrounded by a very complex apparatus of transmission creating a situation where not one person or

organization has the power to ultimately decide which Internet memes or hashtags are circulated. The Internet is a platform that has "flattened" the hierarchical relationship observed in the media institutions discussed by Thompson allowing each and every one of us, who has access to the Internet, to be both producer and receiver of symbolic forms.

Finally, the space-time distanciation involved in the transmission of *social mass media* is, paradoxically, greater and non-existent at the same time. As discussed earlier, the non-space created by the hashtag is one characterized with contemporaneous time. Therefore, the Internet meme and the hashtag have the ability to be produced and received by people who are both spatially and temporally very far away or digitally co-present.

For example, a person "produces" Internet meme-1 from one part of the world, and this production is situated in Context A. Context A is defined at Space-1 and Time-1. A person "receives" Internet meme-1 in Context B. Context B is defined at Space-10 and Time-10. In this scenario the cultural transmission between the person producing Internet meme-1, and the person receiving it is characterized by a very high degree of space-time distanciation.

Now let us assume a third person receives Internet meme-1 in Context C. Context C is defined at Space-1 and Time-1. In this scenario both producer and receiver are digitally co-present. In this scenario a non-existent distance in space and time characterizes the cultural transmission between the person who produced Internet meme-1, and this third person that received it. Such a situation can exist due to the instantaneous nature of Internet memes and hashtags.

With the advent of social mass media Internet users have the capabilities of being both producer and receiver of symbolic forms in the exact same instance. This capability has come about due to the nature of the technical medium of transmission and the apparatus of transmission. Therefore, Internet memes and #s are ushering in a new phase in the mediazation of modern culture because they have changed the three major aspects of cultural transmission.

There are three important takeaways from everything we have discussed so far. First, the # is a new cultural form that allows an individual to instantly engage a mass audience anytime and anywhere; ushering in a new phase in the mediazation of modern culture. Second, the advent of social mass media has created a new mass ceremony that reifies a new *imagined community* through active participation. Finally the space/time created by the hashtag is characterized as *thirdspace*, plus *contemporaneity*; meaning the space in which movements develop and are articulated is characterized with a temporality I call contemporaneous time. But what does this all mean for political contention today? How does *social mass media* impact the way we collectively contest for our interests?

Section 5: How does a Repertoire Shift?

Fundamental changes in collective action are a function of interests, opportunity and organization (Tarrow 1993, 1994; Tilly 1986, 1995a, 1995b). And Charles Tilly and Sydney Tarrow have largely explained changes in interests, opportunity and organization as being a function of macro-structural changes in society. Tilly writes that a "repertoire evolves in two different ways: big structural changes reshape the means of collective action that are available to people, as people themselves refashion each individual means of action in response to new interests and new opportunities (Tilly 1986: 34). In *Power in Movement*, Sydney Tarrow (1994) traces the development of political contention by focusing on three broad sociopolitical processes: "the development of modular forms of collective action; the growth of social networks and national communications media; and the consolidation of the political opportunity structure of the modern state" (Tarrow 1994: 27). But scholars, such as Sewell (1992, 1996) and Young (2002), have challenged this narrative by revealing the role cultural schemas play in the formation of political contention. Therefore, to understand how fundamental changes in collective action occur we must understand how both structural and cultural mechanisms are directly related to the formation of interests, opportunity and organization.

I will first quickly define what a repertoire of contention is. Move onto a discussion of Tarrow and Tilly. Then conclude with a discussion of the role of culture in all of this.

Tilly defines a repertoire of contention as:

> With regard to any particular group, we can think of the whole set of means it has for making claims of different kinds on different individuals or groups as its *repertoire* of contention. Because

> similar groups generally have similar repertoires, we can speak more loosely of a general repertoire that is available for contention to the population of a time and place. (Tilly 1986: 4)

A repertoire comes to be defined, for a population of a given time and place, through struggles against the state. To define a repertoire one must look at which social groups are mobilized, what interests are involved in the claim making, what tactics make a political difference and which are the organizational structures utilized. Let us take Tilly's case study of Great Britain to further illustrate what both Tilly and Tarrow call modular forms of collective action.

Tilly and Tarrow observe three fundamental characteristics that illustrate the rupture between "the traditional repertoire of contention," which characterizes claim making prior to the mid-19th century, and the "modern repertoire of contention," which characterizes claim making since the mid-19th century. The traditional repertoire of contention is *parochial*, *bifurcated* and *particular*, whereas the modern repertoire of contention is *cosmopolitan*, *autonomous* and *modular*.

The interests involved in claim making prior to the mid-19th century were *parochial* because they were "concentrated in a single community" (Tilly 1995b: 45), whereas the interests involved in claim making since the mid-19th century are *cosmopolitan* because they "[span] many localities or [affect] centers of power whose actions [touch] many localities" (Tilly 1995b: 46). Prior to the formation of the modern repertoire of contention, claim making was *bifurcated.* Meaning ordinary people utilized two forms of claim making depending on whether they were addressing local or national issues/objects. When it came to local issues/objects, they utilized direct action; when it came to national issues/objects they utilized a local patron or authority "who might

represent their interest, redress their grievance, fulfill his own obligation, or at least authorize them to act" (Tilly 1995b: 45).

Finally, the tactics utilized in the traditional repertoire of contention consisted of grain seizures, public shaming and blockages; tactics that were *particular* because "the detailed routines of action varied greatly from group to group, issue to issue, locality to locality" (Tilly 1995b: 45). On the other hand, modern tactics consist of demonstrations, strikes, public meetings, mass petitions, seizure of public space and the national social movement; tactics that are *modular* because they are "easily transferable" and allow for a degree of uniformity across groups, issues and localities.

In sum, claim making prior to the mid-19th century is characterized as *parochial, bifurcated* and *particular*, whereas claim making afterwards is characterized as *cosmopolitan, autonomous* and *modular* – three characteristics that describe the modular tactic of "the national social movement" (Tarrow 1993, 1994; Tilly 1986, 1995a, 1995b).

The national social movement is a modular form of protest that emerged in response to changes in two macro-structural processes: the centralization of state power, which led to the formation of the modern nation state, and the expansion of capitalism. In the case of the United States these changes were the result of "new forms of association, regular communications linking center and periphery and the spread of print and literacy," (Tarrow 1994: 48). Throughout the 18th century, state power expanded and centralized resulting in ordinary people framing and directing their grievances towards state institutions of power. In order to address their interests and grievances ordinary people began to organize in loosely tied groups called associations – a concept

comparable to Benedict Anderson's (2006) concept of an *imagined community*. Furthermore, these associations were the direct result of three other processes: the expansion of print capitalism, increased literacy amongst the population and the concentration of individuals in urban centers for employment. Therefore, the shift from the traditional to the modern repertoire of contention was the logical development of contentious politics between ordinary people and changing state institutions.

The final thing to discuss is the role of culture in all of this, but first we must have a working definition of culture. Swidler reframes culture as a "toolkit" of "symbols, stories, rituals and world views, which people may use in varying configurations to solve different kinds of problems" (Swidler 1986: 273). Swidler claims that with this working definition of culture, scholars can better analyze culture's causal effects on action by shifting focus to understanding "strategies of action" – a concept that refers to how individuals order action through time – because underlying a strategy of action are the cultural components used to construct it. Meaning "strategies of action are cultural; the symbolic experiences, mythic lore and ritual practices of a group or society…provide resources for constructing strategies of action" (Swidler 1986: 284). Comparable to a repertoire of contention, cultural repertoires are a function of historical events that change the "costs of cultural retooling" (Swidler 1986: 284).

Although Swidler's working definition of culture is robust in explaining action, it lacks an understanding of how structure can mitigate action. Sewell defines structure as "composed simultaneously of cultural schemas, distributions of resources, and modes of power" (Sewell 1996: 842) giving us a more robust understanding of the relationship

between historical events, structure and culture. Therefore, "a historical event is (1) a ramified sequence of occurrences that (2) is recognized as notable by contemporaries, and that (3) results in a durable transformation of structures" (Sewell 1996: 844). In sum, where Tarrow and Tilly exclusively relied on sociopolitical processes to explain durable transformations in structure, Sewell and Swidler help to give us a more robust understanding of how fundamental shifts in structure occur by reframing culture as a process in the mobilization of resources. But how do Sewell and Swidler affect the narrative, propagated by scholars from a "contentious politics" perspective, regarding how a repertoire shifts?

Young writes, "The first U.S. national social movements were not a heritage of the state and they engaged in a form of life politics" (Young 2002: 660). Young shows that the temperance and antislavery movements developed a modular form of protest that called "individual and nation to repent and reform," called "confessional protests," during a historical time period when U.S. state power was rather weak. Such a claim raises serious doubts regarding claims made by scholars from both a "contentious politics" and "life politics" perspective. As we have discussed, Tilly and Tarrow claim that the emergence of the national social movement marks the rupture between traditional and modern forms of protest because it is a modular form of protest that was the direct result of contentious politics between ordinary people and changing state institutions. Therefore, Young's claim raises serious doubts because he shows how in the 1830s "a cultural mechanism combining the evangelical schemas of public confession and the

special sins of the nation…shaped the modular form and the national and special purposes of [confessional protests]" (Young 2002: 661).

This means what "is needed to explain the first U.S. national social movements is an appreciation that struggles very much like the life politics of today emerged in the 1830s within civil society" (Young 2002: 662). Young goes on to show that a cultural schema (Sewell 1996) must be both intensive and extensive to "control or generate significant resources" during unsettled (Swidler 1986) and institutionally differentiated settings. Therefore, it was the power of the cultural mechanism to combine the evangelical schemas of public confession and special sins of the nation that created an intensive and extensive cultural schema, which "reflexively linked the personal and the public," creating the first modular form of protest – the confessional protest.

There are two important takeaways form this section. First, there are both structural and cultural mechanisms responsible for a repertoire shift. Second, the emergence of a modular form of protest, whether it is the *national social movement* or the *confessional protest*, marks the rupture between the traditional repertoire of contention and the modern one because it marks the transition from *parochial, bifurcated* and *particular* forms of protest to *cosmopolitan, autonomous* and *modular* ones.

Section 6: Observations from the Field

On June 20, 2013, 300,000 Cariocas – residents of Rio de Janeiro – filled Avenida Presidente Vargas and walked from Candelária to the Prefeitura (the city government building), while over 700,000 other Brazilians across the country demonstrated in 75 different cities. Put another way, nearly 1 in every 200 Brazilians came to the streets to express their indignation. This specific demonstration is one of many that have occurred in Rio de Janeiro this summer. While many have called this episode of contention a youth movement or a movement for the reduction of public transport, I claim that both are correct and wrong at the same time.

As we just discussed in the prior section, fundamental changes in collective action are a function of interests, opportunity and organization. The modern repertoire of contention has come to be defined as *cosmopolitan, autonomous* and *modular*, with the emergence of the national social movement or confessional protest marking the rupture away from the traditional repertoire. Drawing on two-and-half months of participant observations I conducted in Rio de Janeiro, I attempt to reframe this episode of contention – #VemPraRua – as a new form of protest I call the "hashtag movement." I claim that the "hashtag movement" marks the rupture away from the modern repertoire of contention, and similar to the characteristics of a #, this new repertoire of contention is: *parochial but cosmopolitan, contemporaneous,* and *horizontal*.

Horizontal [Organization]

The organizational structure of #VemPraRua is horizontal, meaning there is no established or centralized leadership that oversees all of the protests. Instead, the

organizational structure of #VemPraRua consists of many nodes, each with its own organizational structure that are then activated at times of mass mobilization. This allows for a number of social groups and organizations to work independently, making the movement impossible to coopt or be hijacked. The primary mechanism for "decision making" in such an organizational structure is the General Assembly, motivated by a philosophy that starkly contrasts the organizational structures of past social movements (McCarthy and Zald 1973, 1977; Morris 1981).

On June 18, 2013 hundreds packed a room at the Rio de Janeiro Federal University's Institute of Philosophy and Social Sciences (IFCS) to hold a general assembly to discuss the future direction of the movement. After hours of deliberation, the assembly voted and agreed upon: the route the June 20th demonstration would take, the time at which it would start, and five propositions that have since been printed and distributed. The five propositions are:

1. Reduction in the price of bus fares.
2. Right to free expression. An end to police repression, the criminalization of social movements and the use of lethal, and non-lethal, weapons on protestors.
3. Money for the World Cup and Olympics for health and education.
4. No forced evictions.
5. Democratic management of cities by popular decision.

In order to make decisions, such as the ones I mentioned, the general assembly adopts a philosophy of consensus. What I mean is instead of the general assembly coming to a decision, it comes to a consensus. The important difference being that a consensus embraces difference because the general assembly is not focused on convincing anyone but rather on deliberation. This creates a space for any individual, social group or

organization to voice their interests and goals in a way that can affect the trajectory of the movement.

This organizational structure emerged through years of contentious politics between ordinary people and state institutions. Gustavo Miehl, an organizer for the Comitê Popular, told a reporter from the *Financial Times*, "We are seeing now a new moment of re-articulation of these groups that are contesting the way the national government and the government of the city is doing politics. " Brazil has a long history of struggle, which includes a period in time where the government adopted policies to "eradicate" leftist movements by either coopting the organization or killing organization leaders (McSherry 2005). Therefore, what we are seeing in #VemPraRua is not a "lack of organized, institutional leadership" but the re-articulation/rebuilding of it.

Moreover, the institutions that #VemPraRua targets are fundamentally different from those targeted by past social movements. A source of Cariocas – residents of Rio de Janeiro – indignation resides in the fact they have no voice in the decision-making process regarding the transformation of their city. Rio's "preparation" to host the World Cup and Olympics is tied up in international bodies, such as FIFA and the IOC (International Olympic Committee), along with international money-interests such as foreign investors and multinational corporations.

This means the organizational forms utilized by the Free Pass Movement, and even the Alter-Globalization Movement, are losing their ability to affect political change because the interests motivating this form of protest is both local and global. Therefore

the interests motivating this form of protest are parochial but cosmopolitan at the same time. I go into what I mean next.

Parochial but Cosmopolitan [Interests]

Given the horizontal organizational structure of #VemPraRua, plus the philosophy of consensus, a whole slew of interests can motivate the forms of protests we see today in Brazil. This starkly contrasts with both the *parochial* interests of the traditional repertoire of contention and the *cosmopolitan* interests of the modern repertoire of contention because the interests can be parochial but cosmopolitan at the same time. A participant in a general assembly can be from the Rio's favela of Maré voicing concerns of police brutality in the community, while at the same assembly a middle class student can speak of a worker's consciousness. The interests differ in scale, yet both are equally accounted for in the movement because no one person or organization has ultimate say in the trajectory of the movement.

Furthermore, such an organizational structure combined with the diversity of interests represented by #VemPraRua has led many people to accuse this form of protest as lacking goals or execution. In the NY Times op-ed titled From "'No' to 'Go," Roger Cohen writes, "…the eruptions whose shared slogan might be 'Enough is enough!' are good at protest and resistance but much less good at defining objectives…They thrill in the negative. They tend to fizzle in the affirmative." Writing about this most recent wave of movements, Zeynep Tufecki (2013) writes, they can easily generate "collective action around shared grievances to stop or oppose something rather than strategic action geared towards obtaining and sustaining political power."

Both Cohen and Tufecki frame this diversity of interests and tactics as a weakness of #VemPraRua when what needs to be done is change our understanding of what kind of interests motivate the mobilization of a "successful" movement. #VemPraRua has successfully forced the government to: reduce the bus fares, to throw PEC 37 and Cura Gay out, two controversial legislative bills, and in September the government will vote on reforms to the political structure of Brazil. The protest form of #VemPraRua has had much political success because it is articulated and sustained by a diversity of interests and issues, a characteristic that starkly contrasts both the traditional and modern repertoire of contention.

Contemporaneous [Opportunity]

As discussed earlier the # creates a new mass ceremony through participation. Individuals and state institutions engage with protestors through hashtags. This allows the movement to articulate and frame itself through the dissemination of hashtags in a way that allows for each individual protestor to represent him- or herself. Remember *social mass media* is a new symbolic form with minimal interaction with media institutions. In turn *social mass media* creates a protest form I call *contemporaneous* because instead of needing to use a modular form of protest this new form of protest is effective at political change because it promotes a reiteration/adaptation of protest forms. It is the # that compiles and categorizes these diverse tactics into a single stream through the protestor's use of hashtags such as #VemPraRua. Therefore, the protest form is contemporaneous because each participant, social group and locality has the ability to reframe the diverse tactics into a single stream.

For further clarification, there are a number of hashtags that have been utilized throughout the wave of protests in Brazil. #protestoRJ, #protestoRecife, #protestoSP, #BHnasruas are all hashtags that capture the experiences of protests in the cities of Rio de Janeiro, Recife, São Paulo and Belo Horizonte respectively. As discussed before, hashtags on Twitter are strategically utilized meaning hashtags proliferate as a function of their usefulness and popularity. Hashtags are a reflection of the everyday realities and experiences of the users. Therefore the hashtags #protestoRJ, #protestoRecife, #protestoSP, #BHnasruas are a way for protesters in each of those cities to participate and construct the wave of protests occurring in those cities. This allows for each city to have its own trajectory and framing, but in a way that is publicly broadcasted to other individuals, localities and state institutions.

Other hashtags such as #mudaBrasil, #OGiganteAcordou, #VemPraRua and #ChangeBrazil are more general. Search any one of them and you can see a whole plethora of experiences of movement participants from all over the country. Moreover, these hashtags are a way for people outside of Brazil to see firsthand the experiences of protestors and to directly communicate with those on the streets. Typically what you will see in a tweet is a tweet from both sets. This therefore connects a protester from a specific locality to the larger social movement that is represented by the more "general" hashtags. This is why the movement is best understood as #VemPraRua instead of as the Free Pass Movement.

This means the new protest form of today is organized and articulated in a similar manner to how the # is organized and articulated. Instead of shying away from difference

to show a "united front," the hashtag movement thrives on the diversity by utilizing social mass media to provide the space that reframes these "disjointed" forms of protest as one social movement – as #VemPraRua. No one demand or organizational form plays a central role in the articulation of #VemPraRua because it is the active participation of those on the streets and those in the stream that create the hashtag movement. Therefore, the hashtag movement marks the rupture away from the modern repertoire of contention because it is a protest form that is *horizontal, parochial but cosmopolitan* and *contemporaneous*.

Section 7: Discussion and Conclusion

When Brazilians believe something is going to end with no effect they love to say that it is, "Going to end in Pizza." I believe #VemPraRua will not end in pizza and while the international media has shifted their attention away from Brazil, the protests continue. What we are seeing now are political parties, unions and other government officials trying to take advantage of the political opportunity generated by the movement to push their agenda. Furthermore, the Free Pass Movement, which played a pivotal role in "initiating" the wave of demonstrations the week of June 17th, has lost credibility in the eyes of the people by meeting with the Mayor of Rio de Janeiro and other government officials. The national day of demonstrations held July 11th was organized by the unions of Brazil, and were not heavily supported by #VemPraRua. All of this has undermined the political strength of #VemPraRua but I believe the movement will bounce back in the coming years.

In Brazil, the impending mega-events will provide increasing international attention and protests will prosper in their wake. The week of June 17th, which was the peak for #VemPraRua, was only a rehearsal for the World Cup. The movement is only beginning and now that people have rehearsed, expect even larger demonstrations in Brazil over the coming years.

What we are seeing today in Brazil–the most recent addition in the wave of large-scale movements that began with the Arab Spring–is a new kind of revolution. Revolution 2.0 is organized, articulated, and the momentum sustained through constant sharing of ideas and events on social media. Although many of these movements have

"failed" to reconfigure their governments, they have been successful in getting millions to collectively say "no" and have enabled a new consciousness – a necessary first step to change. These movements are not trying to change the operators of the political machinery. They are trying to change that very machinery, and that takes time. Therefore, over the coming years I expect to see a refinement and re-articulation of #VemPraRua. It is through contentious politics that a repertoire of contention is formed over time.

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